



National Archives and Records Administration

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AMERICAN STATE PAPERS: PUBLIC LANDS AND CLAIMS

The *American State Papers* is a compilation of Congressional documents covering the time period 1789 to 1838. The destruction of the Capitol in 1814 as well as the lack of adequate recordkeeping in the early Congresses heightened the interest of Congress in publishing the records of the Senate and House in an organized and accessible form. In an Act of March 2, 1831, Congress made provision to publish executive and legislative writings from the first thirteen Congresses in order to preserve them for the public. Between 1832 and 1861, Congress printed 38 volumes of documents. Of special significance in the *American State Papers* is the critical period from 1789 to the printing of the first volume of the *U.S. Serial Set* in 1817. The 38 volumes are organized into ten series:

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| I. Foreign Relations | VI. Naval Affairs |
| II. Indian Affairs | VII. Post Office Department |
| III. Finances | VIII. Public Lands |
| IV. Commerce and Navigation | IX. Claims |
| V. Military Affairs | X. Miscellaneous |

Series VIII (*Public Lands*) and IX (*Claims*) have special genealogical significance. The claims contained in these two series of the *American State Papers* often provide information of genealogical value to the researcher such as ages of claimants, locations of claims, places of residence, as well as names of wives, children and other relatives. A complete set of the *American State Papers* is located in the Archives Library Information Center in Washington D.C.

PUBLIC LANDS

The *American State Papers* contains eight volumes relating specifically to public lands. The land grants and claims in the *American State Papers* consist of military bounty lands, militia claims, pre-emption rights, homestead settlements, claims by refugees, agreements with Indian Nations, and the settlement of private land claims on public domain that the United States acquired from foreign governments. These claims offer a largely untapped resource to family information in early America.

The bulk of information in these volumes covers various types of claims on public domain of the United States. The public domain is land owned by the Federal Government that is subject to sale or transfer of ownership under laws passed by Congress and includes western lands that the original states ceded to the United States as well as acquisitions from foreign governments.

States that the United States formed from the public domain are called public land states. Land claims in the following public land states are dealt with directly in the *American State Papers*: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

The original 13 states, Kentucky, Maine, Tennessee, and Vermont, have no public domain; however, several of these states ceded land to Congress for the benefit of the United States. This land then became part of the public domain. The *American State Papers* contains information on land claims dealing with the following states and their cessions to the United States: Georgia, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, and Virginia.

CLAIMS

Series IX of the *American State Papers* deals with claims presented to Congress that were not directly related to land claims. For most of the 19th century, Congress served in an appellate capacity on private claims against the United States. The documents in this Series cover a wide array of claims brought before Congress from 1789 to 1823.

INDEX

The National Archives has a printed comprehensive index to Series VIII (*Public Lands*) and Series IX (*Claims*) of the *American State Papers*.

_____ McMullin, Phillip W., ed. GRASSROOTS OF AMERICA; A Computerized Index to the American State Papers: Land Grants and Claims 1789-1837 with other aids to research (Government Document Serial Set Numbers 28 through 36). Salt Lake City, UT, Gendex Corporation, 1972. (J33.M3)

The index is organized alphabetically by last and first name as it appears in the *American State Papers*, followed by the volume number and page number separated by a colon. The volumes are numbered 1 through 9. Volumes 1 through 8 correspond to volumes 1 through 8 of *Public Lands* and volume 9 corresponds to the only volume of *Claims*. This publication is available in the Archives Library Information Center in Washington D.C.

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